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ABSTRACT

Replicating earlier research, a study examined parental expectations for their children in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Subjects, 88 parents approached as they were leaving the supermarket, were asked whether they thought their children would learn how to speak, listen, read, and write. Interviews were conducted by 21 preservice teachers who had collaborated in the development of the replication. Results indicated that, of the 88 parents interviewed, 80 expected their child to learn how to listen, 86 expected their child to learn how to write, 87 expected their child to learn how to speak, and 85 expected their child to learn how to read. However, many of the negative comments were given in a sarcastic tone, making it difficult to interpret the validity of the recorded response. The preservice teachers were administered an informal questionnaire. Results indicated that participation in the research process allowed them to interact with parents in a real situation and to discover that most parents have high expectations for their children learning. Results also indicated that the preservice teachers gained knowledge of the processes involved with conducting research and enjoyed being involved. Further research will alter the order of interview questions, sites for conducting interviews, and the extent to which parents are informed of the purpose of the interviews. (Contains the interview instrument and two figures of data.) (RS)

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REPLICATING RESEARCH WITH PRESERVICE TEACHERS

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Running Head: Replicating Research

Article Abstract

In our preservice teacher education courses, the role of teacher as a decision maker is stressed. The variety of decisions a teacher will make on a daily basis, ranging from curricular concerns to issues of classroom management, is discussed. Preservice teachers must be able to objectively evaluate their classrooms so appropriate modifications can be made as they assess the effectiveness of their teaching. We entered into a research partnership with our preservice teachers to provide them an effective method for evaluating their classrooms and to actively involve them in a investigation.

In our preservice teacher education courses, we stress the role of teacher as a decision maker. We discuss the variety of decisions a teacher will make on a daily basis, ranging from curricular concerns to issues of classroom management. Preservice teachers must be able to objectively evaluate their classrooms so that appropriate modifications can be made.

One of our program goals is that preservice teachers exit the program being disposed to maintain a "personally engaged but reasonably critical view of schooling" (Connell, 1985). Our graduates must be able to observe what is happening in their classrooms and evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching. Failure to do so results in the preservice teacher not being able to keep up with recent practice and results in what Young (cited in Warawa, 1988) has referred to as the "current-traditional paradigm" or what we like to call "being-in-a-rut." To inform practice, preservice teachers must be aware of current theory and research.

Queenan (1988) reported that the expectation for teachers to conduct research in their classrooms is becoming more and more prevalent. Experienced teachers know that informal research is conducted on a daily basis. Many of the graphic models that are used when discussing the teaching process mimic the steps of the research process. On a typical day teachers ask questions about methodology and its impact upon students--state purpose. Teachers formulate reasons for the success or failure of the lesson--generate hypotheses. Teachers plan the lesson and

prepare for class--review literature. Teachers document observations--collect data. Teachers look for trends and modify what will be done tomorrow because of what happened today or yesterday--analyze data. Classroom teachers are constantly clarifying theories of teaching and learning through this research process. We wanted to help preservice teachers make the connection between teaching and research and view themselves as teacher-researchers.

Atwell and Myers (cited in Queenan, 1988) contend that the ability to conduct research in our classrooms is gained through participation in the discovery process. If we wanted our graduates to conduct research in their classrooms, then we needed to actively involve them in ours. We decided to enter into a research partnership with our preservice teachers so that they would become active participants in the process of research (Schwartz, 1988).

This study evolved over a four-year examination of the literature concerning holistic methods of teaching reading. Constantly within the literature were references to Brian Cambourne's twenty years of research investigating linguistic environments and the conditions which facilitate children's acquisition of literacy. While investigating the role expectations plays on a child's ability to acquire language, Cambourne approached 29 parents of young children in a supermarket, and after engaging these parents in a short conversation about their child, asked the parents if they

expected their child to learn to speak. "Every parent I asked answered in the affirmative. Most were surprised to be asked such a stupid question. Some got angry and would respond 'Of course, there's nothing wrong with him/her!'" (Personal communication, November 9, 1992).

In addition to reviewing literature, videotapes were viewed. Andrea Butler mentions the results of Cambourne's supermarket experience in one videotape concerning creating environments conducive to children's acquisition of literacy (Rigby Education, 1987). Butler acknowledges that while parents may hold high expectations for their children learning to speak, she questions whether parental expectations for their children learning to read would be as high as expectations for learning to speak. Butler suggests that instead of parents responding with an emphatic, "Of course he/she will", parents would be more hesitant and reply "I hope so."

Classroom discussion of Cambourne's research and Butler's assumption always prompted interesting and varied discussion with preservice teachers. Thus, Cambourne's initial findings along with Butler's assumption provided the basis for our study. In addition to researching parental expectations for speaking, we decided to expand on Cambourne's question and to research parental expectations for their children in all areas of the language arts--listening, speaking, reading, and writing. We felt that replication was an excellent way of introducing preservice teachers to the process of research since replication

affords a study that has already been carried out and would allow preservice teachers an opportunity to examine the many aspects of the research process.

We met to discuss the logistics of the replication and create the interviewing instrument (See Figure 1). The interviewing instrument was one page in length and required approximately thirty seconds to administer. The parent's gender, whether or not the parent agreed to be interviewed, and if there was agreement, the child's name, collected solely for the purpose of personalizing the interview, were the first three items of information collected. The next four items of

Insert Figure 1 About Here

information collected were those relating to parental expectations. Initially, the four questions concerning whether or not parents expected their child to learn to listen, speak, read, or write, were posed in what we thought to be a developmental sequence. A comment by a preservice teacher, wondering if the sequence would be too leading, prompted us to randomize the questions. The final information recorded was whether or not there were other children in the family.

Teacher-researchers view teaching as a process through which one discovers personal teaching and educational philosophies (Queenan, 1988). We wanted to involve preservice teachers in the research process to provide them an effective method for

critically evaluating their classrooms, and thus discovering their personal philosophies. Preservice teacher volunteers were recruited to participate in the interviewing process. Schwartz (1988) indicated that compensation for student volunteers is to be expected, though the compensation need not be monetary. Preservice teacher volunteers were allowed to exchange classroom assignments that would require equivalent amounts of time spent working on the study to compensate their participation.

A workshop was held for the preservice teacher volunteers to gain insight into the project and to establish interrater reliability. The workshop began with a short review of the research and explanation of the study. Several role playing sessions were held. We portrayed the roles of parent and interviewer while all preservice teacher volunteers assumed the role of recorder. The importance of recording exactly what they observed was stressed. Due to the rapid interchange between parent and interviewer, it became evident that a system for recording the interview was necessary.

It was during the workshop that we noticed we had become involved in actual collaboration with the preservice teacher volunteers. We must be willing to see ourselves as partners in the research process and view preservice teachers as colleagues for true collaboration to take place (Schwartz, 1988). Each perspective and idea was considered by the group and the roles of teachers and students vanished in the quest for the solicitation of the most descriptive and unbiased data. Often times,

preservice teachers' input raised issues or perspectives that would not have been considered if the research was being conducted in their absence.

Descriptors were brainstormed, listed, discussed and selected. After much dialogue, it was determined that parents would most likely be sure, unsure, offended, passive, or impatient. The beginning letter of each descriptor appears along the left margin of each question. Interviewers were to circle the letter which corresponded to the parental attitude they observed during the interview. Role playing continued until an interrater reliability coefficient of 1.00 was achieved.

In keeping with Cambourne's research, we selected a supermarket chain and were granted permission to conduct the study. Preservice teacher volunteers formed two-member teams and signed up for two-hour time slots. One team member was responsible for interviewing the parent and the other team member was responsible for recording the interview. Preservice teacher volunteers were instructed to secure supply packets from the departmental office and return interview results to the departmental office upon completion of their interviews. Supply packets contained questionnaires, a clipboard, a pen, and two name tags. Team members were to check into the store with the store manager via the customer service counter and then station themselves near the store's entrance.

Twenty-one preservice teacher volunteers participated in the study. Two-member teams were located at six supermarkets for

eighteen separate two-hour sessions. The study was implemented as planned.

Of the 97 parents approached, 88 agreed to be interviewed, 23 of which were male and 52 of which were female. Preservice teacher volunteers failed to record gender for 13 parents who agreed to be interviewed.

We found, as Cambourne did, that parents expect their children to learn how to speak. However, Butler's assumption, that parents would not have as high expectations for their children learning to read as they had for their children to learning to speak, was refuted.

Insert Figure 2 About Here

Of the 88 parents interviewed, 80 expect their child to learn how to listen, 86 expect their child to learn how to write, 87 expect their child to learn how to speak, and 85 expect their child to learn how to read.

Of the parents responding negatively, eight did not expect their child to learn how to listen, two did not expect their child to learn how to write, one did not expect their child to learn how to speak, and three did not expect their child to learn how to read. It should be noted that many of the negative comments were given in a sarcastic tone, making it difficult to interpret the validity of the recorded response.

While the results showed that parents overwhelmingly expect

their children to listen, write, speak and read, as we began to look at the results of our study, we became more interested in the trends that we were beginning to notice.

The first trend we noticed was the variety of responses became fewer as the interviewing progressed. There were fifteen different responses to the first question, seven different responses to the second question, three different responses to the third question, and five different responses to the fourth question. This caused us to wonder if parents were becoming conditioned to the questions due to their repetitive nature and were not actively considering what was being asked. Although we had initially randomized the order of the questions to compensate for this, we began to question our instrument and its impact on parental responses.

The second trend we noticed was as the interview progressed, parents became more sure, more impatient, more passive, and less unsure and less offended.

Insert Figure 3 About Here

The trends we observed caused us to realize that if we wanted to explore our original question regarding parental expectations, we would need to modify our instrument. Thus, we are now considering this study to be a pilot study of our instrument.

Some discussion of the impact this collaboration had upon

preservice teachers is merited. One of our original goals in replicating Cambourne's research was to involve preservice teachers in the research process. To collect feedback, we administered an informal questionnaire.

Preservice teacher volunteers commented on gaining knowledge related to the processes involved with conducting research. Typical of these responses were, "It was interesting to be part of the project to see how you planned to research the issue" and "During the workshop, I saw the importance of collecting accurate data."

The interviewing process allowed the preservice teacher volunteers to interact with parents in a real situation and to discover that most parents have high expectations for their children learning. When asked, "What do you feel you learned from participation in this study?", preservice teacher volunteers indicated that, primarily, they had learned about parents. Responses included "Most parents have no doubt that their children will learn to do the things we asked about" and "I learned that people do have high expectations of their children when it comes to the areas on the survey." Since all the volunteers were preservice teachers we felt it was extremely important that they be aware of factors that influence the children who are students in their classrooms.

Preservice teacher volunteers overwhelmingly indicated that they had enjoyed being involved. "I enjoyed going outside of the classroom to do something, rather than staying in the classroom

and listening to lectures and group discussion" and "It was very interesting to see and hear the various reactions and responses to these questions" were typical responses.

Responses such as, "I wish there would have been more people showing up at the stores" and "I wish I would have been able to survey more people" caused us to reconsider whether or not to use the same supermarket chain to conduct future interviews.

Preservice teacher volunteers felt that an alternative setting, such as a mall, would have more patrons and thus more potential parents to interview.

Preservice teacher volunteers suggested that we have a different interviewing site, modify our questions to include why parents answered as they did and include an explanation of the study's purpose. We plan to conduct the study again with these modifications.

The study will be replicated two more times. First, we would again randomly order the four questions, then implement the study as before to determine if the same trends resulted.

Second, we would again ask the same questions, but the questions would be asked in isolation of one another. There would be four teams of interviewers. Each of the four teams would interview parents as to their expectations, but each group would focus on only one of the four modes of the language arts. During the single-question interviews, we would also ask parents to justify their response by asking why they answered as they did. This would help us better understand any sarcastic remarks

and may cause parents to give more thought to their answers.

Many preservice teacher volunteers indicated that parents wondered why they were being asked such questions. In future replications, we will provide parents agreeing to be interviewed with an explanatory handout following their interview. The handout would not only explain the study but would hopefully cause some parents to consider the impact of parental expectations on literacy development.

In our preservice teacher education courses, we stress the role of teacher as decision maker, and ultimately, teacher-as-researcher. In our classes, we are constantly wondering about our own methodology, trying it out, and reflecting with students and colleagues as to whether it was effective or not. We want our preservice teachers to do the same. Myers (cited in Queenan, 1988) feels that part of the preservice teacher's coursework should include a teacher-as-researcher component. We concur with Myers. We want our preservice teachers to be consciously aware of what they are doing in their classroom and why they are doing it. We believe that collaboration between preservice teachers and their professors in replicating research facilitates the development of the role of teacher-as-researcher.

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FIGURE 1

Offended Impatient Sure Unsure Passive

1. PARENT (circle one): male female

"WE ARE STUDENTS FROM AUGUSTANA COLLEGE AND ARE SURVEYING ADULTS WITH INFANTS. WE WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU A COUPLE OF QUESTIONS. IT SHOULD ONLY TAKE A MINUTE. WOULD THIS BE O.K. WITH YOU?"

2. PERMISSION (circle one): agreed to be interviewed declined to be interviewed

.....
"WHAT A DARLING BABY. WHAT NAME DID YOU CHOOSE? (CHILD'S NAME) _____

3. "Do you expect (INSERT BABY'S NAME) to learn how to listen?"

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I
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4. "Do you expect (INSERT BABY'S NAME) to learn how to write?"

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5. "Do you expect (INSERT BABY'S NAME) to learn how to speak?"

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6. "Do you expect (INSERT BABY'S NAME) to learn how to read?"

O
I
S
U
P

7. "Do you have other children?" YES NO
 (IF YES) "What are their ages?" _____

"THANK YOU!!!! WE APPRECIATE YOUR TAKING THE TIME TO TALK WITH US TODAY."

FIGURE 2

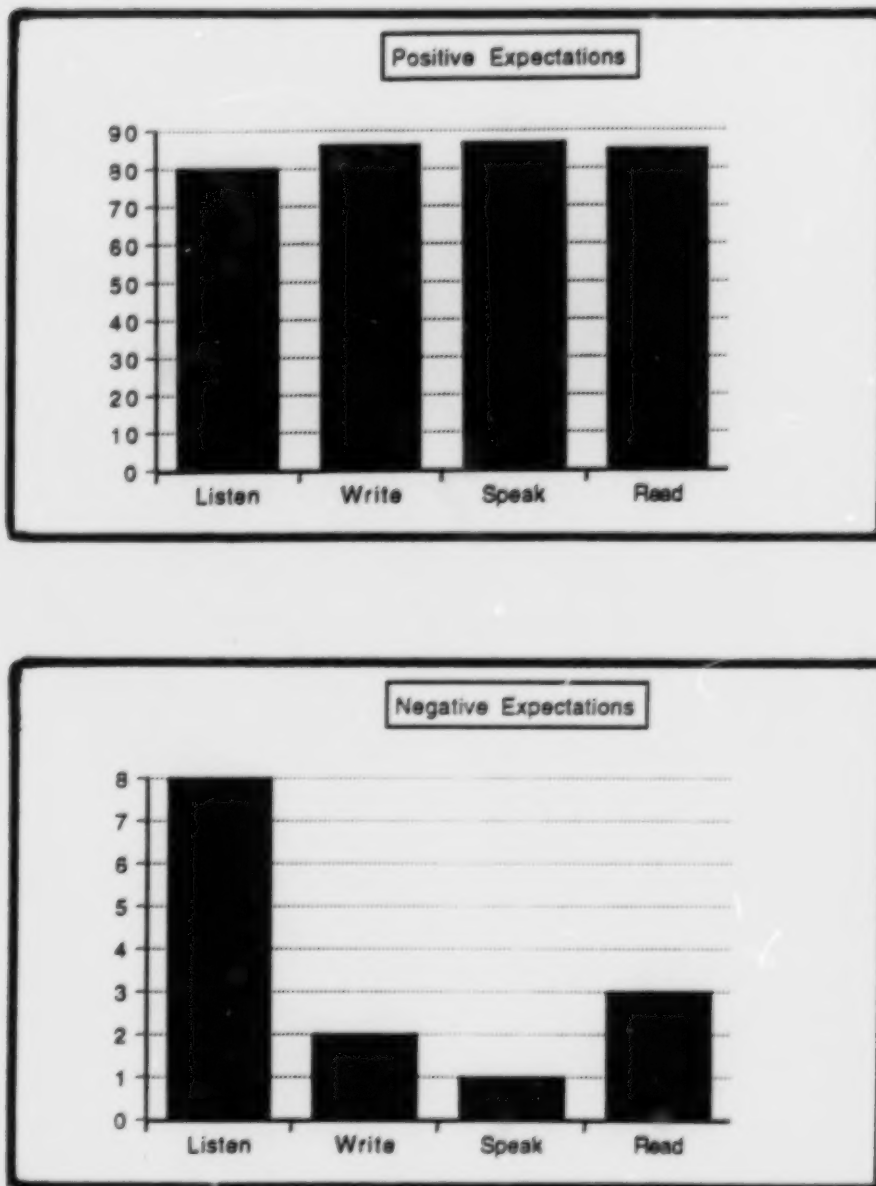


FIGURE 3

